



Everything Michigan

Teen workers

Hours-limit change reasonable if parents do their job

FLINT

THE FLINT JOURNAL FIRST EDITION

Wednesday, March 23, 2005

Twenty hours of work a week besides school can be a heavy load for a teen, but that matter is best left for families to weigh based on individual circumstances.

As long as employers of 16- and 17-year-olds don't exceed that limit, they should not be burdened with sorting out school schedules so they remain within state labor law.

A bill passed by the state Senate simplifies how much high school students can work without deviating much from the current maximum. Rather than limiting a student's work and school load to a combined 48 hours per week, the present standard, Michigan teenagers could work 20 hours weekly no matter their hours in class.

That may sound excessive, but with students averaging 30 hours in school, the pending legislation maintains roughly the existing safeguards against young people ignoring their educations.

However, the change would rightly help employers, who no longer would have to keep track of how much time each of their teen hires is spending in school.

Whether a high school student works - and how much - requires parental oversight. After-school jobs should never crowd out a teenager's first responsibility of performing well in his or her studies.

But whether that happens is controlled more by the tendencies of individual youngsters and family factors than their part-time employment. Indeed, many youngsters owe their ability to go to college on such earnings.

Last year, Gov. Jennifer Granholm vetoed similar legislation that would have allowed teens to work 22 hours a week. She reportedly has reservations about this bill, too, thinking it might result in youngsters losing focus on their classes. However, limiting work to 20 hours seems to provide enough protection that this won't happen, as long as parents do their jobs, too.

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